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ZEN/RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE  
ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS AMMAN 008577

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CONCERN OVER GAS STATION POLLUTION UNITES MIDDLE EAST  
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: TWENTY-TWO PARTICIPANTS FROM ISRAEL, THE WEST BANK AND GAZA, AND JORDAN PUT REGIONAL TENSIONS ASIDE AT A WORKSHOP IN ISTANBUL ON NOVEMBER 12-16 TO FOCUS ON A COMMON CONCERN -- POLLUTION FROM LEAKING STORAGE TANKS AT GASOLINE STATIONS. TWO EPA SPECIALISTS PRESENTED A MEATY, PRACTICAL PROGRAM THAT GENERATED EXCELLENT DISCUSSION WITHIN AND BETWEEN DELEGATIONS. END SUMMARY.

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STATE FUNDS REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL WORKSHOPS  
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¶2. (U) THIS TRAINING WORKSHOP WAS THE SIXTH IN A SERIES OF MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL WORKSHOPS SUPPORTED BY STATE AND ORGANIZED BY USDA/FAS UNDER THE MULTILATERAL PEACE PROCESS WORKING GROUP ON THE ENVIRONMENT. OTHER TOPICS FOR WHICH TRAINING HAS BEEN OFFERED OVER RECENT YEARS INCLUDE HAZARDOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT, WASTEWATER TREATMENT, WASTEWATER REUSE, WATER IN AGRICULTURE, BIOSOLIDS USE IN AGRICULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS. THE USG ORGANIZES THE LOGISTICS, PAYS THE EXPENSES, AND FACILITATES THE SUBSTANTIVE PROGRAM. EIGHT PERSONS EACH FROM ISRAEL, THE WEST BANK/GAZA AND JORDAN WERE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE. TWO PALESTINIAN PARTICIPANTS (ONE FROM GAZA, ONE FROM THE WEST BANK) WERE NOT ABLE TO MAKE IT TO ISTANBUL FOR THE WORKSHOP, DESPITE STRENUOUS EFFORTS FROM CONGEN JERUSALEM AND EMBASSY TEL AVIV.

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EPA SPECIALISTS PREPARED MUCH USEFUL MATERIAL  
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¶3. (U) PARTICIPANTS NOTED WITH APPRECIATION THE BREADTH AND DEPTH OF THE WORKSHOP ORGANIZED AND PRESENTED BY EPA UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANK SPECIALISTS STEVE LINDER FROM REGION 9 (SAN FRANCISCO) AND JUDY BARROWS (HEADQUARTERS). MATERIALS INCLUDED PHOTOGRAPHS, VIDEO SEGMENTS, A CLIP FROM A MAJOR TV NEWS SHOW, PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS, TRAINING MANUALS, GOVERNMENT FORMS, STANDARDS, AND PROCEDURE MANUALS. ALL MATERIALS WERE PUT ON A COMPUTER DISK AND A COPY WAS GIVEN TO EACH PARTICIPANT.

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COLLEGIAL ATMOSPHERE IN ROOM - STILL SOME TENSIONS  
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¶4. (SBU) SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS COMMENTED FAVORABLY ON THE WARM, PROFESSIONAL ATMOSPHERE DURING THE WORKSHOP. THIS WAS A FUNCTION OF THE TYPES OF PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRACTICAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES. IN SOME CASES, PEOPLES' INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT OVERRODE THEIR RELUCTANCE TO INTERACT WITH THE

FACILITATORS AND WITH EACH OTHER. THERE WAS MUCH DISCUSSION WITHIN AND BETWEEN DELEGATIONS.

15. (SBU) THERE WERE TIMES, THOUGH, WHEN THE POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT WERE UNAVOIDABLE. IN A ROUTINE PRESENTATION ON USAGE OF VARIOUS TYPES OF FUELS, A PALESTINIAN PARTICIPANT NOTED A SHARP DECREASE IN DEMAND FOR DIESEL FUEL DUE TO THE FACT THAT A LARGE GENERATOR IN GAZA HAD BEEN BOMBED BY ISRAEL AND WAS OFF-LINE.

16. (SBU) HANDPICKING THE PALESTINIAN DELEGATION FROM NGO'S, BUSINESSES AND ACADEMICS WAS TIME-CONSUMING FOR CONGEN JERUSALEM AND EMBASSY AMMAN ESTH HUB BUT ENABLED THE USG TO FIND INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED TO POLITICAL COOPERATION AS WELL AS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION. TWO MEMBERS OF THE JORDANIAN DELEGATION WHO FULLY AND RESPECTFULLY PARTICIPATED IN THE MEETING CHOSE NOT TO BE IN THE GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OR TO ATTEND A GROUP DINNER ONE EVENING BECAUSE OF THEIR FEELINGS TOWARD ISRAELI ACTIONS IN GAZA. THEIR ABSENCE WAS NOT NOTICED, THOUGH, AND IN FACT THE INTERACTION DURING THE DINNER WAS CASUAL AND FRIENDLY.

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THE VENUE: ISTANBUL WAS A BIG POSITIVE FACTOR  
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17. (U) SELECTION OF ISTANBUL AS THE VENUE WAS AN INSPIRED CHOICE. AS A MAJORITY MUSLIM COUNTRY NOTABLE FOR ITS MODERATE ATTITUDES, TURKEY WAS A COMFORTABLE AND NEUTRAL LOCATION FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM ALL RELIGIONS. ISTANBUL IS CLOSE TO THE MIDDLE EAST, MAKING TRAVEL EASY AND INEXPENSIVE. VISAS WERE NOT DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN. EMBASSY ANKARA AND CONSULATE ISTANBUL, PARTICULARLY FAS FSN IBRAHIM SIRTIOGLU, PROVIDED A CONSISTENT, HIGH LEVEL OF SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE LONG PERIOD OF PREPARATION ON LOGISTICS AND FINDING TURKISH ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIALISTS.

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THE TEAM: LOGISTICAL, SUBSTANTIVE, REGIONAL, LOCAL  
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18. (U) ONE OF THE STRENGTHS OF THE WORKSHOP WAS ITS DIVERSITY. USDA/FAS MANAGED THE LOGISTICS, EPA DEVELOPED THE SUBSTANTIVE PROGRAM, AND STATE PROVIDED REGIONAL EXPERTISE. EPA ALSO ELICITED THE PARTICIPATION, AT HIS OWN EXPENSE, OF BOB RENKES FROM THE TULSA-BASED PETROLEUM EQUIPMENT INSTITUTE, WHO BROUGHT YEARS OF PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE WITH STORAGE TANKS, PIPELINES, GAUGES AND OTHER EQUIPMENT. WITH THE HELP OF STATE COLLEAGUES IN ANKARA, WE CONTACTED TURKISH ENVIRONMENTAL SPECIALIST DR. CEM AVCI FROM BOSPHORUS UNIVERSITY. DR. AVCI PRESENTED A SESSION ON TURKEY'S EXPERIENCE IN MANAGING GASOLINE STORAGE TANKS, AND HE ORGANIZED A HIGHLY USEFUL FIELD TRIP TO SEE THE EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES USED AT A WORKING GAS STATION IN ISTANBUL. EACH OF THE DELEGATIONS HAD PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPANTS WHO ADDED THEIR PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE TO THE DISCUSSION. OTHER PARTICIPANTS CAME FROM GOVERNMENT, ACADEMIA AND NGO'S. THIS DIVERSITY BROUGHT DEPTH AND INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT TO THE DISCUSSION.

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THE ISSUE: LEAKING STORAGE TANKS  
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19. (U) THE SUBSTANCE OF THE WORKSHOP WAS FOCUSED ON PREVENTING, DETECTING AND REMEDIATING LEAKS FROM UNDERGROUND GASOLINE STORAGE TANKS AT PLACES SUCH AS GASOLINE STATIONS, MILITARY BASES, TAXI COMPANIES, RENTAL CAR OUTLETS AND MUNICIPAL GARAGES. TANKS AND PIPELINES BREAK AND CORRODE, LETTING THEIR CONTENTS SEEP INTO THE SOIL AND SOMETIMES INTO GROUNDWATER. WHILE UP TO 50% OF SUCH TANKS AND THEIR ASSOCIATED PARAPHERNALIA LEAK, EPA ESTIMATES THAT LESS THAN 5% OF THE TANKS HAVE A SERIOUS LEAK. TELL THAT TO THE CITY OF SANTA MONICA, THOUGH. GASOLINE, ESPECIALLY THE ADDITIVE MTBE, FROM ONE BADLY LEAKING TANK FOULED ITS ENTIRE CITY WATER SUPPLY. THE TOTAL BILL IS NOW OVER \$150 MILLION, AND THE METER IS STILL TICKING MERRILY. DURING THE WORKSHOP, PEOPLE WERE SWEATING, AND GROANS COULD BE HEARD AROUND THE TABLE AS THE SANTA MONICA CASE HISTORY WAS PRESENTED. WITH JORDAN TRANSITIONING SOON AWAY FROM LEADED GASOLINE AND TOWARDS MTBE-ENHANCED GASOLINE, THE LESSONS FROM SANTA MONICA WERE HIGHLY RELEVANT.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: THIS WAS THE FIRST THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE JORDANIAN DELEGATION HAD EVER MET ISRAELIS. WE CONSIDER OUR DUAL MISSION TO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL ON BOTH FRONTS: PROVIDING A FORUM FOR ARABS AND ISRAELIS TO MEET AND WORK TOGETHER, AND HELPING TO ADDRESS AN IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

HALE